



Plugfest returns for manufacturers to improve customers' product experiences

BY MILTON DAVIS

Plugfest 2019

AFTER YEARS OF ESTA CONTROL PROTOCOLS PLUGFEST events, you might think they have become repetitive or that there is nothing new to be gained. The most recent Plugfest, held on the July 20th weekend in Westlake, TX, demonstrated that there is definitely a strong need for these events. There is always more to be learned. As new standards are being written, there are continuously new products and ideas to be tested.

Plugfest is a unique opportunity for manufacturers to connect lighting products with those of other manufacturers to test and resolve network compatibility challenges. Attendees bring controllers, automated lights, control protocol analyzers, and other network-connected components. People attend from around the world to pursue improvement of their customers' product experiences. The ESTA Plugfest has become a required step in many global manufacturers' product development roadmaps.

In this iteration of Plugfest, we saw new attendees and the final draft of the *E1.33 –Entertainment Technology – Message Transport and Management for ANSI E1.20 (RDM) Compatible and Similar Devices over IP Networks (RDMnet)* standard. RDMnet is a generational step forward, extending the functionality of RDM to Ethernet networks. CPWG organizers expect to see products with RDMnet features to begin to appear at trade shows later this year. RDMnet was formally ratified by ANSI on August 27, a few weeks after Plugfest closed. The Plugfest event enabled attendees to test their implementations of the new standard with subject matter experts who authored this *E1.33* on hand to answer questions and to assist with interpretation and problems.

In addition to the RDMnet standard, testing and verification for compliance with *ANSI E1.11 (DMX512-A)* and *ANSI E1.20 (RDM)* standards was taking place. There were discussions about DALI and even 0 – 10 V controls. Although it is not an ESTA-published document, use of the DALI standard is growing in the US. Similarly,



The moderators and attendees in Westlake, TX, gather just prior to the RDMnet roundtable discussion that included dozens of online participants via WebEx.

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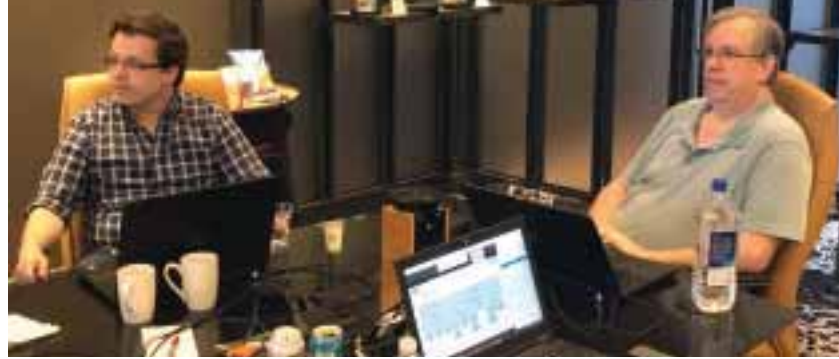
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Presenters Sam Kearney and Scott Blair, Co-Chairs of the E1.33 Task Group explained RDMnet attributes.

simple 0 – 10 V analog controls (ANSI E1.3 and IEC 60929) are in wide use. Discussions on the application and subtleties are all welcome at the Plugfest.

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"An Introduction to RDMnet" presentation contained many graphics illustrating the concepts of the RDMnet protocol and how they relate to one another.

Bringing the standards-writing process together with practical demonstrations of those standards is proving to be a powerful combination. There are functional prototypes which implement the final draft of the E1.33 standard as that document is being published. This builds confidence in the practicality and credence in the standard. There are real-world examples of the protocol in use as the standard is being published.

Anyone with an interest is invited to attend the Plugfest events. To get a preview of standards in development and to contribute to those efforts, you are encouraged to join ESTA's Control Protocols Working Group. The group is in particular need of individuals with

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knowledge of control protocols who fall into the dealer or general interest categories of membership. See <http://estalink.us/wg> for details about joining the Control Protocols Working Group.

RDMnet roundtable discussion

In addition to the Plugfest activities, a roundtable discussion was held on Sunday evening. This was attended with many of the Plugfest participants in the room and by dozens of online attendees through WebEx conferencing free of charge to ESTA members and non-members. The topic was "An Introduction to RDMnet." The session was hosted by Scott Blair and Sam Kearney who are the Co-Chairs of the *E1.33* Task Group. Questions from online participants and session moderation was handled by Jason Potterf who is also a member of the *E1.33* Task Group.

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The presentation covered the various parts of the RDMnet protocol and how they relate to one another. Practical examples of each portion were described and illustrated in the presentation slides. ETCP certified technician participants were identified and received credit toward their recertification.

If there are topics that you would like to see in future roundtable discussions, please send us an email and let us know. Send your requests to plugfest@esta.org. You can attend future discussions in person or via WebEx conferencing. Keep an eye out for announcements about upcoming discussions and for future Plugfest events from ESTA or at <http://estalink.us/plugfest>. Discussions are under way for potential events in January and July of 2020. ■



Milton Davis is a Co-Chair for ESTA's Control Protocols Working Group. He has been in the entertainment lighting industry for over 35 years. Milton is an ETCP Certified Entertainment Electrician and is an ETCP Recognized Trainer. He is employed by Doug Fleenor Design where he designs hardware and software for new products and provides product support. He can be reached by email at milton@dfd.com.



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